



GARY TAUCHEN

State Representative • 6th Assembly District

(608) 266-3097
FAX (608) 282-3606
Toll-Free (888) 529-0006
Rep.Tauchen@legis.wi.gov

P.O. Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708-8953

Senate Committee on Agriculture and Higher Education Public Hearing Testimony on SB 497

Good morning Chairwoman Vinehout. I want to thank you for scheduling SB 497 and I appreciate the opportunity to join Senator Lassa in addressing you and the rest of the committee this morning.

The goal of SB 497 is to provide a tool to help in retaining more food animal veterinarians in Wisconsin. It is vital not only to our agricultural industry, but to overall food safety and to our public health system.

Wisconsin is seeing a trend that is playing out nationwide with more veterinarians choosing to leave food animal practice and instead choosing to practice on companion animals or small animals. Small animal practice essentially has better hours, isn't as labor intensive, and can be much more profitable.

At the same time more veterinarians are leaving food animal practice, fewer veterinary students are choosing to enter the food animal program at the UW School of Veterinary Medicine and other vet schools around the country. Combine that with the fact a large percentage of food animal veterinarians currently in practice are nearing retirement, and Wisconsin is faced with a major shortage.

A shortage of food animal veterinarians could potentially pose a major risk to the state's near \$60 billion agricultural industry and to food safety in general. Farmers who don't have reliable access to a food animal veterinarian may choose to not have their animals treated. This could result in a delay in the detection of a foreign animal disease, posing a major threat to the entire livestock population and potentially the food supply.

There is an effort underway not just at the state level, but nationally to develop a closer link between veterinary medicine and human medicine. Roughly 75% of the emerging diseases today are zoonotic, meaning they can transfer from the animal population into the human population. Food animal veterinarians are an extremely important link in the public health chain and can at times be the first to discover an emerging disease before it spreads rapidly through the human population. The University of Wisconsin recognizes this critical link and offers a dual DVM/MPH program to students.

SB 497 would add food animal veterinarians to the existing Health Professional Loan Assistance Program (HPLAP), which provides up to \$50,000 in loan forgiveness to doctors, dentists, and nurse practitioners who agree to practice in shortage areas. Students who graduate with a DVM have similar debt loads to students who graduate from

medical school and dental school and The HPLAP seems like the most logical fit for this program. We have talked with the School of Medicine and Public Health, where the HPLAP is administered, and they are supportive of what we are trying to do in SB 497.

SB 497 would allow a veterinarian who agrees to work at least 35 hours per week and devote at least 50% of their practice to treating food animals for up to four years to receive up to \$50,000 in loan forgiveness. We recognize that very few veterinarians practice strictly on food animals and a more typical rural practice also treats small animals and horses to help supplement their income and provide a much needed service to local residents.

Senator Lassa and I understand that this bill alone isn't going to solve the shortage of food animal veterinarians in the state, but it is a start. The School of Veterinary Medicine has a program, the Food Animal Medical Scholars Program, which provides undergraduate students who want to practice food animal veterinary medicine admission to the DVM program three years into their undergraduate studies. We hope the Food Animal Loan Forgiveness Program will provide an incentive for those same students, and other practitioners, to remain in food animal medicine once they settle in a community and establish a practice.

We recognize the state's fiscal limitations and the bill simply creates the program and does not provide for an appropriation at the present time. It is our hope that as the state's fiscal situation improves, an appropriation will follow closely behind and that veterinarians practicing food animal medicine can begin to take advantage of the program.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this morning and I would urge the committee to pass SB 497.



Statement of Support, SB 497

Chairperson Vinehout, distinguished members of the Committee on Agriculture and Higher Education: I am Daryl Buss, Dean of the University of Wisconsin-Madison's School of Veterinary Medicine.

I am pleased to indicate my support of Senate Bill 497, creating a partial loan forgiveness program for veterinarians pursuing careers in food animal practice in Wisconsin. A shortage of food animal veterinarians is not just an issue for agriculture but for public health, given the importance of maintaining a safe, secure, and wholesome food supply. I believe the partial loan forgiveness program defined in this bill will be important in helping to attract and retain graduates into careers in food animal practice.

The need for more rural food animal practitioners is part of an overall shortage of veterinarians in the United States. A pressing national need for more veterinarians, not only in food animal practice, but in such fields as public health, laboratory animal medicine, biomedical research, industry, academia, and government service have been identified by a series of national studies, several conducted by the National Academy of Sciences. Because of that need, our students are highly sought in all of the many career options within veterinary medicine. As you might expect under those circumstances, many of those career options have developed very attractive recruitment and retention programs. In the case of the US Army Veterinary Corps, for example, students joining the Veterinary Corps are immediately commissioned as second lieutenants in the US Army Reserve and, while enrolled in our school, receive pay for tuition, books, equipment, and most academic fees, along with a living stipend of more than \$1,900/month for 10 ½ months of the year. For the remaining 6 weeks of the year, they are paid as a second lieutenant in the US Army Reserve, at an annualized salary exceeding \$31,000. Upon graduation, they are commissioned as a Captain in the Veterinary Corps, at a beginning salary exceeding \$65,000/year, plus benefits. Moreover, Veterinary Corps veterinarians have the opportunity, later in their career, to receive specialized training, in areas such as public health, pathology, laboratory animal medicine, and others, again with all expenses paid.

A student today faces the prospect of a very significant debt load by the time they receive their veterinary medical degree. The average level of indebtedness at the time of graduation for the new veterinarian, whether from the UW or nationally, now approximates \$120,000. It must be noted that figure represents the total of all of the debt, undergraduate as well as professional degree, educational debt as well as personal debt, incurred by a student, but all of it must be paid. Given that situation, it is easy to see why the US Army Veterinary Corps has been so successful in recruiting both outstanding veterinary students and excellent graduate veterinarians from private practice.

School of Veterinary Medicine • Office of the Dean

2015 Linden Drive • Madison WI 53706

608/263-6716 • FAX: 608/265-6748

<http://www.vetmed.wisc.edu>

Advancing animal and human health with science and compassion®

But they are not alone. I mentioned the need for more veterinarians in biomedical research. Veterinarians are eligible for such NIH programs as the one designed to increase the number of professionals engaged in pediatric research. In exchange for a two-year commitment to the veterinarian's research career, NIH will repay up to \$35,000 per year of qualified educational debt, plus the NIH will pay an additional 39% of the repayments to cover Federal taxes, and may reimburse state taxes that may result from these payments. There are a series of requirements and constraints, as with all such programs, but my point is that a student with interests in food animal practice is exposed, throughout their education, to many attractive career options within veterinary medicine. Certainly, the lure of those alternatives is increased when such attractive financial and professional benefits are part of active recruitment plans.

I believe that, similarly, food animal veterinary medicine needs a recruitment and retention plan. With an increasingly urban society, fewer and fewer of our applicants come from farms, or even from rural communities. So, they do not enter our program with a built-in understanding of agriculture and of life in a rural community. In such a circumstance, it is often easier for the student and their spouse or significant other to see the challenges of rural practice - long hours, late night drives on country roads, sometimes in bad weather, heavy and potentially dangerous physical work, possibly limited spousal career opportunities, and the like, than it is for them to see the many personal, family, and professional benefits that are so highly valued by veterinarians who have spent their careers serving production agriculture.

Senate Bill 497 is not a panacea. We must work hard to recruit rural youth into all areas of agriculture, including veterinary medicine. We must continue to work within the veterinary medical profession and within agriculture to help identify talented students, beginning at the middle school level and continuing at the high school level. That means we must also reach high school guidance counselors and the parents of these youth so they, at minimum, do not discourage students from considering veterinary medicine as a career, but instead help steer talented students to veterinary medicine.

While this bill will not, by itself, produce more food animal veterinarians, it does represent an important recruitment and retention incentive for our students to pursue this career choice. In a very real sense, this is an investment in animal agriculture, in public health, in rural Wisconsin and our rural communities, and I am pleased to support it.



Daryl D. Buss, DVM, PhD
Dean & Professor



Philip C. Johnson, DVM
President

Steven Erickson, DVM
President Elect

Douglas D. Kratt, DVM
Past President

Kim Brown Pokorny
Executive Director

2801 Crossroads Dr., Suite 1200, Madison, WI 53718 ■ (608) 257-3665 ■ fax (608) 257-8989 ■ www.wvma.org
Advocating and promoting veterinary medicine, while enriching animal and human health

Senate Committee on Agriculture and Higher Education

Testimony In Support of Senate Bill 497

February 10, 2010

Good morning Chairperson Vinehout and distinguished members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Higher Education. My name is Dr. Ray Pawlisch. I am a member and past-president of the Wisconsin Veterinary Medical Association and a dairy practitioner in Brodhead, Wisconsin. It is my privilege to appear before you today on behalf of the 90 percent of licensed veterinarians in Wisconsin who belong to the WVMA. We respectfully ask for your support of Senate Bill 497.

First, allow me to thank Senator Julie Lassa and Representative Gary Tauchen for their leadership in introducing this important legislation. If passed, SB 497 will serve to help attract qualified graduating veterinarians into food animal medicine.

The concern over a shortage of food animal veterinarians is not only for the health and well-being of animals, but also for the safety of the food supply and the health and well-being of the consuming public. Ensuring



Philip C. Johnson, DVM
President

Steven Erickson, DVM
President Elect

Douglas D. Kratt, DVM
Past President

Kim Brown Pokorny
Executive Director

2801 Crossroads Dr., Suite 1200, Madison, WI 53718 ■ (608) 257-3665 ■ fax (608) 257-8989 ■ www.wvma.org
Advocating and promoting veterinary medicine, while enriching animal and human health

there are sufficient food animal veterinarians is imperative for the health of our state and nation.

Veterinarians protect our food supply by making certain our food-producing animals are healthy. We hear about diseases such as foot and mouth, e-coli, salmonella, cryptosporidium, mad cow disease, anthrax, pseudorabies, tuberculosis and many others. Veterinarians are a critical line of defense in recognizing these dangerous diseases so that they are not passed from animals to humans.

Please allow me to tell a story that happened in 1976 to my father, Dr. Ronaldean Pawlish in Brodhead. My dad visited a farm in Decatur Township to treat sick hogs. Before he left the farm, he asked the producer how his family was and where the herd manager was. He was told the herd manager, who cared for the hogs on a daily basis, was very ill. He asked what the herd manager was sick with and the producer told dad they didn't know, but listed the symptoms. Dad noted those were the same symptoms he had observed within the hog herd. He took nasal swabs of the hogs and wanted them compared with the herd manager's sample. He brought the samples UW campus to the



Philip C. Johnson, DVM
President

Steven Erickson, DVM
President Elect

Douglas D. Kratt, DVM
Past President

Kim Brown Pokorny
Executive Director

2801 Crossroads Dr., Suite 1200, Madison, WI 53718 ■ (608) 257-3665 ■ fax (608) 257-8989 ■ www.wvma.org
Advocating and promoting veterinary medicine, while enriching animal and human health

laboratory of fellow veterinarian Dr. Bernard Easterday and had them evaluated. Sure enough, they had the same virus. This was the first documented case of simultaneous infections with an influenza virus – then called swine flu - that was passed from animals to humans in the United States. If not for a food animal veterinarian presence and observance, such a link may never have been found.

Certainly, this committee would also recognize the important role of the veterinarian in protecting the state's economy by diagnosing diseases that can spread quickly, putting a strain on Wisconsin's ability to export animals and products from animals.

Practicing food animal medicine is a lifestyle that may not be desirable to everyone. The life of a food animal veterinarian is physically demanding. The hours are long and our knees, shoulders and backs tend to wear out.

But there are new graduates who want to live and work in a rural area but are discouraged because of their heavy student debts. I personally know of a new graduate who started in food animal medicine. She had



Philip C. Johnson, DVM
President

Steven Erickson, DVM
President Elect

Douglas D. Kratt, DVM
Past President

Kim Brown Pokorny
Executive Director

2801 Crossroads Dr., Suite 1200, Madison, WI 53718 ■ (608) 257-3665 ■ fax (608) 257-8989 ■ www.wvma.org
Advocating and promoting veterinary medicine, while enriching animal and human health

grown up on a farm and loved cows, but changed her career path two years after graduation because her debt load was "eating her up." She joined a biomedical firm. She told me she regretted the decision, but felt she had no other alternative.

Student debt has been rising faster than starting salaries. The mean starting salary for veterinarians in 2008 was roughly \$60,000, according to the American Veterinary Medical Association's Graduating Seniors Survey, while the mean student debt was roughly \$120,000.

The shortage of food animal veterinarians has received attention in the national and local media. All of our data suggests that without a concerted effort, Wisconsin will experience a shortage of food animal veterinarians in the relative short term.

Recent studies show that demand for food supply veterinarians nationally will increase by 12-13% between now and 2016. And at the same time there is a forecasted shortfall of 4 to 5% annually through 2016.



Philip C. Johnson, DVM
President

Steven Erickson, DVM
President Elect

Douglas D. Kratt, DVM
Past President

Kim Brown Pokorny
Executive Director

2801 Crossroads Dr., Suite 1200, Madison, WI 53718 ■ (608) 257-3665 ■ fax (608) 257-8989 ■ www.wvma.org
Advocating and promoting veterinary medicine, while enriching animal and human health

In addition, over the past decade, an increasing number of veterinarians have moved from food animal to companion animal practices.

- In 1997, **forty-five percent** of Wisconsin veterinarians touched a cow on a daily basis. Today **32 percent** do.
- And in 1997, **35 percent** worked exclusively on companion animals; today that has increased to **49 percent**.

Those practicing food animal medicine are also getting older. Fifty-four percent of food animal veterinarians in Wisconsin are older than 45.

In closing, let me again thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak in support of Senate Bill 497. You have an opportunity to encourage new veterinarians to practice food animal medicine by removing their debt. In doing so, you will help to ensure the health of our animals, public health and food safety.

I will be happy to respond to any questions you may have.

Senate Committee on Agriculture and Higher Education

Public Hearing

February 10, 2010

Testimony in Support of 2009 Senate Bill 497

Submitted by Adam Ward

I would like to thank the committee for allowing me time to speak to you today. My name is Adam Ward. I am a third year veterinary medical student at UW Madison. I grew up on a small dairy farm just over 2 hours north of here near Arpin, a rural part of Wood County. I graduated from UW-River Falls with a degree in Dairy Science before starting school here in Madison.

I have spent my life around farms and animals. Having lived in a few different regions of Wisconsin, I have had the privilege of seeing our strong dairy industry continue to provide jobs and income for the people of this state. Veterinarians are a critical and necessary component to allow those producers to be successful, to maintain their animals' health and welfare, and to safeguard public health.

Becoming a veterinarian is expensive! Quite frankly the thought of graduating with enough debt to match the purchase of a house is rather

daunting. But it is a profession that I am proud and excited to call myself a member.

The beautiful thing about obtaining a DVM is that as a degree, it is quite versatile. I myself have been amazed at what options exist after graduation. Graduates have the option to enter several sectors of the profession—be it clinical practice, public health, or government. This is great for us to stretch our wings, but it also presents a myriad of options that may offer more lucrative pay than food animal practice.

As for my own plans following graduation, I don't know. I am considering exploring my passion for veterinary medicine by completing an internship and possibly a residency in large animal medicine. Maybe I'll jump right into a good food animal practice—there are plenty in Wisconsin. I've even tossed around the idea of taking off for a year to work abroad as a veterinarian in Australia, New Zealand, or Europe. My point is that my colleagues and I are interested in, and positioned to do, many great things. By securing passage and funding of this bill, you will be adding one more reason for graduates to consider food animal practice in Wisconsin.

Thank you for your consideration and I would be happy to answer any questions.



JULIE LASSA

STATE SENATOR

Senate Committee on Agriculture and Higher Education

Senate Bill 497

Wednesday, February 10, 2010

Good morning Chairwoman Vinehout and committee members.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 497 which creates a food animal veterinarian loan assistance program administered by the UW System Board of Regents.

When it comes to public health not many people think about food animal veterinarians and the important role they play in keeping the public safe. Nor do most people realize that the United States and Wisconsin currently have a shortage of these veterinarians and that this shortage will grow in future years due to retirements. Food animal veterinarians are not only critical to Wisconsin farmers and our agricultural industry; they are an early warning system for public health officials. Nearly 75% of diseases, like avian flu, are zoonotic meaning they can spread from animals to humans. Veterinarians see diseases in the animal population before they spread to the human population, giving the public health community a better chance to prepare and prevent a massive outbreak.

During recent years an increasing number of veterinary school graduates are choosing to focus their practice on small and companion animals rather than food and large animals because the hours and pay are better and they can work in suburban areas. This problem, along with the impending retirements, poses a challenge to Wisconsin's agricultural industry and is a public health risk for our state's citizens.

As members of the Agriculture Committee I'm sure you understand that food animal veterinarians are critical to maintaining a strong and healthy livestock population. Farmers who do not have access to a food animal veterinarian may suffer significant economic losses while trying to locate a vet, choose to hire unqualified individuals to treat their animals or may not have their animals treated at all. This could result in a delay in the detection of animal diseases, posing a major health threat to livestock and different sectors of our agricultural industry as well as pose a significant threat to human health.

SB 497 allows a veterinarian who agrees to work at least 35 hours per week and devotes at least 50% of their practice to treating food animals for up to four years to receive up to \$50,000 in loan forgiveness. We believe that this program will attract additional veterinary school graduates to practice in the food animal field.

Although SB 497 does not provide funding for this program, Representative Tauchen and I believe it can be funded when the state's financial situation improves in the future. We believe the state's current budget difficulties should not stop the legislature from putting the framework in place for this program which is so important to both animal and human health.

Thank you for your time.